

For immediate release
February 9, 2004

COMMISSION ANNOUNCES DECISION ON FLOOD CONTROL PROJECT VEGETATION MAINTENANCE

U.S. Commissioner Arturo Q. Duran of the International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico, today signed a Record of Decision selecting a vegetation management program for the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project in Texas. The decision follows preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) analyzing various alternatives for vegetation maintenance. The purpose of the vegetation maintenance program is to maintain the river's capacity to convey flood flows, in accordance with longstanding agreements between the United States and Mexico.

The Record of Decision confirms the selection of the Preferred Alternative, the Continued Maintenance Alternative, discussed in the EIS. Under this alternative, the United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) will continue vegetation maintenance activities in place since 1993, consisting of mowing a 75-foot strip along the Rio Grande for a 34-mile reach just upstream of Brownsville, Texas. Under this alternative, vegetation maintenance would cover an estimated 291 acres.

"This alternative reflects the appropriate balance between fulfilling the Commission's flood control responsibilities and maintaining habitat," said Commissioner Duran.

The USIBWC implemented its current vegetation maintenance program following a 1993 Biological Opinion of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (renewed in 2003), which required the

Commission to modify its mowing regime to reduce potential impacts to threatened and endangered species.

The Record of Decision also notes stakeholder concerns for project flood control capabilities. To address those concerns, the USIBWC intends to enter into consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine if there are other areas within the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project where the Commission could mow without harming threatened or endangered species.

Separate from its vegetation maintenance program, the USIBWC has been conducting studies of Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project levees and the Project's ability to carry flood flows safely. As a result of these studies, the Commission is initiating a program to rehabilitate and raise levees to improve flood protection.

For more information:

Sally Spener
915-832-4175
sallyspener@ibwc.state.gov

Doug Echlin
915-832-4741
dougechlin@ibwc.state.gov